



LETTERS TO A LADY,

EMBODIED

A Popular Sketch of the History of Architecture,
AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF
THE VARIOUS STYLES WHICH HAVE PREVAILED.*

My dear Scyllah :

In my last I spoke to you of Athens and of Pericles,—Pericles, whom Croly calls,—

"Of more than men, the more than king."

Let us return for a time to that wonderful state which still exercises such influence in the education and thoughts of nations.

Athens, you will remember, has seen numerous vicissitudes. It was first burnt by Xerxes; a year afterwards by Mardonius. It was destroyed in the Peloponnesian war, injured by Sylla, and ravaged by Alaric, king of the Goths. In 1687 it was besieged by the Venetians, when a bombshell fell upon the Parthenon, which was at the time used as a powder magazine, and certainly did not improve it. The circumference of the city walls, when intact, was $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles; may we not with justice exclaim—How small! how great! You will find in the British Museum a large model of the damaged Parthenon, and a second, showing what it originally was, according to the opinion of the artist. I will not pledge myself to all his details, but it is nevertheless an interesting work and may be usefully studied.

You may see there, too, amongst other important illustrations of our subject, a large Doric capital from the Propylæum at Athens (about 437, B.C.), and one from the Parthenon; an Ionic capital from the Temple of Diana, at Daphne, on the road to Eleusis, and some exquisite friezes.

The Acropolis of Athens was, without exception, the most interesting spot in the heathen world, and on the highest part of it stood the Temple of Minerva, or the Parthenon, which I have pointed out to you as illustrating the Doric order. Ictinus and Calliocrates were the architects, and Phidias executed the sculpture. It is built of white marble, with excellent masonry, and displays the most minute attention in the arrangement of the lines with a view to obtain the most perfect effects. The columns lean towards the interior, partly, perhaps, to oppose the greater resistance to the pressure of the roof, and have a swelling outline, called *entasis*, which gives grace and greater apparent solidity. The horizontal lines are also slightly curved (it is the same, too, in some of the other temples there), but modern investigators have not yet agreed amongst themselves as to the exact motive for this arrangement. The Parthenon was the repository for the public revenues: at one time more than two millions sterling was placed there. There was then no "London and Westminster" or "Commercial Bank." In later times Westminster Abbey and other mediæval buildings were used for the same

purpose. The principal sculptures from the Parthenon are, as you know, in the British Museum. They cost Lord Elgin 74,000*l.* and were bought by the trustees of the Museum in 1816 for 35,000*l.* All that Lord Elgin gained by the undertaking was the withering abuse of Byron and others for riving

"—what Goth and Turk, and time hath spared."

It was not an act to be followed or excused, but it has nevertheless benefited English art. Here in the Parthenon stood the masterpiece of Phidias, the statue of Minerva, which had gold on it alone worth 120,000*l.* One of the tyrants took off the gold mantle and put on a cloth one, saying he thought it would keep the goddess warmer: it is seldom difficult to find an excuse for pursuing our own course.

I endeavour to avoid hard names as much as possible, but I will run the risk of telling you that a portico or colonnade is described as:—

Tetrastyle—when it has four columns in front;

Hexastyle—when there are six columns in front;

Octastyle—eight columns; and

Decastyle—ten columns: according to the Greek numerals.

The enclosed portion of a Greek Temple is called the cell. A temple is said to be—

In antis—when the side walls of the cell run out to the front, and finish with *antæ*, or pilasters, with two columns between. Fig. 15 will give you an example of this:

Prostyle—when there are columns in front only:

Amphiprostyle—columns in front and rear:

Peripteral—when surrounded by columns forming a walk round the cell:

Dipteral—when with a double range of columns on each of its flanks:

And *Hypæthral*—when without a roof.

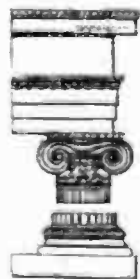


Fig. 17.



Fig. 18.

Fig. 16 represents the front of the beautiful little IONIC temple on the Ilissus: this is

amphiprostyle—that is, it has columns in front and rear. The Ionic capital you know is distinguished by a spiral scroll on each side, called a "volute." Fig. 17 shows this peculiarity more at large. The General Post-office in St. Martin's-le-Grand and the British Museum will serve you as examples of the Ionic order in London.

Of the asserted invention of the Doric order by the Dorians, and of the Ionic by the Ionians, I need not here say anything.

The earliest known example of the use of the CORINTHIAN throughout a structure is in the beautiful temple called the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates, at Athens, and here you have a drawing (Fig. 18) of the capital, entablature, and base of the column. This structure, which is often called "the Lantern of Demosthenes," was erected, 330 years before our era, in commemoration of a theatrical victory. It is now surrounded by crumbling modern tenements, and is scarcely to be reached by one with a nice sense of delicacy.

You have, doubtless, heard the charming story that Vitruvius tells concerning the invention of the Corinthian capital? How that a pretty maiden of Corinth dying, her nurse collected in a basket some trifles to which she had been attached, and placed it on her grave, with a tile upon it to preserve them longer: and how that an acanthus plant sprang up around the basket, and formed so beautiful a figure, that Callimachus, a Greek sculptor, happening to pass, was struck by its elegance, and evolved from it the Corinthian capital. There are Egyptian capitals, and even Greek capitals, long anterior to Callimachus, which approach more closely to the Corinthian than the nurse's basket: still we need not give up the pretty and touching story altogether, for it may have led to the perfecting of a form which may be called one of the most complete and beautiful works of man. For 2,000 years and more it has stood before the world, defying improvement.

The mildness of the climate of Greece allowed much to be done out of doors or under porticoes. As they did not use the arch, their buildings were narrow and contracted, or were open at top, and awnings were used temporarily. The public buildings were decorated with unbounded profusion, but perfect taste. The adornments were special for different purposes, and the garland of flowers, the lyre, the tripod, and the gilded shield had each its particular office and place, and were not stuck up indiscriminately and absurdly as we have used them in our imitations.

The leading principle of Greek architecture is *horizontal*; while *verticality*, as you will hereafter see, is the predominant principle in Gothic architecture. The long unbroken entablature on the top of the columns gave an unvaried rectangular outline, in Greek architecture, from which there was no getting away. It produced one structure of perfect beauty—the portico; but beyond this it did not successfully go: within this, however, all is faultless. Shall I stop to mention that all the mouldings in Greek architecture are distinguished by grace and beauty? They consist mainly of flowing curves, not parts of a circle, as in Roman architecture. What you know as Hogarth's "line of beauty" (technically the *cyma*), enters greatly into the composition of them; and it is not a little singular, as Mr. Hosking mentions in his valuable "Treatise on Architecture," that Hogarth, in his well-known *Analysis of Beauty*, although he did not know, and could not have known, the contours of Greek architectural mouldings, has given the principle of them, and, under his line of beauty, has described many of the finest Greek forms.

Of their domestic buildings, their houses, we know very little; the notices in the Greek writers are few and obscure. The houses were unassuming till a late period in Grecian history. Afterwards they became more luxurious. Demosthenes made it a charge against Midias that his house was more important than others in Eleusis. An *Illustrated Grecian News* of that period, which would give us a peep into the house of the Athenian, and his

* No. VII. Also pp. 100, 133, 164, 196, 228, and 230.